Arabic Calligraphy | Civilisation of the Word

‘Some artisans used calligraphy purely decoratively, thereby creating illegible inscriptions.’

The custom of inscribing the name and titles of the patron and bestowing on him blessings is a personal statement by the patron to commemorate his patronage, especially when the items concerned are being presented to public institutions such as mosques and madrasas. Objects were sometimes transported for long distances to reach their intended destinations and had, therefore, the potential to inspire local practitioners. Some artisans, on the other hand, used calligraphy for purely decorative reasons, creating illegible inscriptions that were not meant to be read at all.



Name:
Textile with prayer niche (mihrab)

Dynasty:
Hegira 12th–13th century / AD 18th–19th century Ottoman

Details:
Museum of Civilisations | Museum of Oriental Art "Giuseppe Tucci"
Rome, Italy

Justification:
The naskhi script distributed in mirror form round the borders and centre of this wall-hanging is illegible and is employed here for purely decorative reasons.



Name:
Textile with prayer niche (mihrab)

Dynasty:
Hegira 12th–13th century / AD 18th–19th century Ottoman

Details:
Museum of Civilisations | Museum of Oriental Art "Giuseppe Tucci"
Rome, Italy

Justification:
Detail of mihrab textile showing the black and gold naskhi inscription-band at the centre-top.



Name:
Rug

Dynasty:
Hegira 7th century / AD 13th century Anatolian Seljuq

Details:
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts
Sultanahmet, Istanbul, Turkey

Justification:
Monumental and illegible kufic script was used commonly used on the borders of Turkish rugs.



Name:
Tray

Dynasty:
Hegira 742 / AD 1341 or AH 762–4 / 1361–3 Mamluk

Details:
Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:
The seven thuluth inscriptions in praise of a Mamluk sultan have had their verticals extended to maximise their radiating effect.



Name:
Hexagonal dinner stand

Dynasty:
Hegira 728 / AD 1327 Mamluk

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
An extravaganza of Arabic thuluth inscriptions covers this stand giving praise to the Mamluk sultan al-Nasir Hasan ibn al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, who ruled three times between 693 to 741 / 1294 to 1340.



Name:
Alhambra vase

Dynasty:
Hegira 8th century / AD 14th century Nasrid

Details:
National Archaeological Museum
Madrid, Spain

Justification:
A vase that was made in Malaga in the fashion of a vase from Alhambra.
The Arabic kufic calligraphy employed on the body is a repetition of the word 'forgiveness'.



Name:
Chest

Dynasty:
Hegira 422–55 / AD 1031–63 Taifa kingdoms

Details:
National Archaeological Museum
Madrid, Spain

Justification:
The kufic inscription includes thanks to God and bestows blessings on the owner.
